

Criticism and Oblivion

Bruno Nassim Aboudrar

Translator: Simon Pleasance



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/1908>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.1908

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 April 2003

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Bruno Nassim Aboudrar, « Criticism and Oblivion », *Critique d'art* [Online], 21 | Printemps 2003, Online since 27 February 2012, connection on 20 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/1908> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.1908

This text was automatically generated on 20 April 2019.

EN

Criticism and Oblivion

Bruno Nassim Abouddar

Translation : Simon Pleasance

REFERENCES

Fermigier, André. *La Bonne et la mauvaise peinture : chroniques d'art*, Paris : Gallimard, 2002, (Nrf)

Rochlitz, Rainer. *Feu la critique : essai sur l'art et la littérature*, Bruxelles : La Lettre volée, 2002, (Essais)

Art de proximité & distance critique : la fonction critique de l'art, Paris : Sens & Tonka, 2002, (Sur l'art 10/Vingt)

Histoires de 50 ans de l'association internationale des critiques d'art/AICA = Historias de 50 anos de la asociación internacional de críticos de arte/AICA = Histories of 50 years of the International Association of Art Critics/AICA, Paris : Aica press, 2002

L'Invention de la critique d'art, (sous la dir. de Pierre-Henry Frangne, Jean-Marc Poinot), Rennes : Presses universitaires, 2002

- 1 For Baudelaire, art criticism was in part bound up with what makes half of art itself (the other half being its eternal part): "the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent"¹. The fact is that for some thirty years he have lost oblivion, for if we retain its psychological faculty, our computer-like memories—flexible extensions, no less—do store things. How is criticism possible when oblivion no longer is? It is possible thus to formulate the crisis of criticism which each publication here considered strives to describe, conceive and ward off.
- 2 From Fermigier, with an anthology provided by Françoise Cachin and Adrien Goetz, to Rochlitz, the reader witnesses the shift, essentially on the same level, from ease to malaise. Fermigier, who was apparently little concerned with the art contemporary with him, happily commented on the effort of memory made by curators after the Second World War, tending to exhume 19th century art. Fermigier criticized; he discriminated, appraised, and compared; he failed to see that the work of curatorship, modern in this

sense, was aimed at nothing less than once and for all denying the oblivion in which the official conventional masters had been buried—that it was aimed at showing everything and presenting everything. Fermigier, last of the happy critics. Rochlitz painfully knew that everything is henceforth here forever but, with Don Quixotism (the term is not used in any derogatory sense here), also that things cannot be resolved by criticism renouncing its power of judgement—of condemning, if such a thing is possible, to oblivion. In order to find the strength to no longer be merely laudatory, criticism would have to philosophically underpin the reasons for its verdict. The aesthetic foundation of forms of critical judgement would have the effect of reducing the dispersal of opinions, encouraging discussion rather than dispute; argumentation is a strength. Rochlitz offers as examples his own critical works, where seriousness appears like the stitching of subjectivity. For this is the nature of the tragic crisis: in order to save judgement, criticism must sacrifice taste.

- 3 The visual form of the present, of this total and permanent present of absolute memory, is presence; the fact, for artworks, not only of being all there (“good and bad”, as Fermigier put it), but also of being offered as proximity, trying to exercise a seduction (in the etymological sense) by reduction of the distance that has to be covered as far as self. The proximity in which many contemporary art events are held has long been understood as a critical faculty gained by art: by renouncing any form of pedestal, frame and other historical and haughty marker of distance, art would infiltrate society and, within it, with a new effectiveness, liberate its critical and subversive charge. Now, based on a reading of the minutes of a recent conference, this topos of the critical function of art is cracking: Elisabeth Lebovici shows the risks of abolishing the distance, then describes the means of warding them off. But her conclusion is pessimistic: the proximity of art gradually dissolves it in the way in which its critical function is drowned. However, the impression that emerged from the diversity of the contributions to the conference was rather that of a criticism of the topos of the critical function of art than of a questioning of this function itself.
- 4 The other great form of absolute memory, this time regarding the distance as such and no longer its practical or virtual abolition, is memorization: history, storage, and reporting. This basically modern project, which the “Archives de la critique d’art” embrace even unto their name, underpinned the conference, *L’Invention de la critique d’art*. Inventing means this: bringing to presence. Today, because we are in a mnesic system, art criticism is being invented everywhere (for example, here, in South America, too) by everyone (here: feminists, jazz-lovers) and, above all, all the time². Over and above interest specific to each contribution, the Rennes conference thus extended in its actual principle to the problem of criticism, while at the same time contributing, through its storage vocation, to nurture it: is a piece of art criticism possible when, with everything being memorized, there is no longer anything “transitory, fleeting”, nor any choice to be made, whose sanction would be oblivion? Or, alternatively, is a critical history of criticism now the only thing that is possible and desirable—in other words, a narrative where a reflective consciousness would trace its path through quasi-exhaustive archives? Contributions in *L’Invention de la critique d’art* and in *Art de proximité & distance critique* reinstated the possibility of the “transitory” and the “fleeting” within memory itself. Pierre-Damien Huygues called upon Hume to reintroduce something akin to a weakness. According to Hume, he explained, most of our judgements recount between them various events that have affected our memory, postulating a causal link which does not logically exist: we

speculate upon reason precisely where our mental, and essentially memory-related activity merely makes a “mention”. In so far as aesthetic experience, of which art criticism is the discourse, is essentially a mention (being intrinsically bound up with the experience of the work), an apodictic judgement is impossible, and its speculation alone (proceeding as if it were logical) is permissible. Criticism thus seems still possible, whether it subtends the weakness of the mention or whether it postulates reason for itself, because even when memory becomes absolute, the link between the objects (or facts) that it recounts remains rationally weak, and speculation on this link desirable. Pierre-Henry Frangne described the movement (historical, as well as ontological, or programmatic) of criticism via Mallarmé “thinker of crisis as of the movement of suspense”. Mallarmé, a most singular reader of Hegel; and this point is also the one where memory, albeit absolute, includes–“upheaval”–the instance of its denial: at the very moment when language names it, the fact attains its “vibratory quasi-disappearance”. Art criticism thus seems possible as long as it is capable of declining its object, and its own history draws it into it. As for this history, taken at the level of its recent instatement, that of the AICA, if we are to believe Ramon Tio Bellido, it turns out that it is itself sporadic, leaving room for the efforts of storage and oblivion.

NOTES

1. Baudelaire, Charles. “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, in *Ecrits esthétiques*, Paris : U.G.E., 1986, p. 372.
2. In the Graeco-Latin culture, in the 16th century, in the 18th century, in the 19th century–photography–, in the 20th century–film and jazz.